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ATG Interviews Jim Stephens

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Chairman of the Board, EBSCO

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: A June 11, 2004 news release announced your plans to retire from EBSCO, effective July 1, 2005. What are your plans after that date?


JS: I will continue to be EBSCO's Chairman of the Board and will remain active in understanding, monitoring and helping the company's activities. One definition of retirement is rising two or three mornings weekly with more favorable timing. I will take more personal time to be with family, enjoy the outdoors and travel to the more off-track places of the world. On July 1, 2004, I was named Chairman of the Board of Trustees at **Birmingham-Southern College**. For a number of years, I've served as Chairman of its Academic Affairs Committee, so I'm looking forward to this new opportunity. With 39 years as President of EBSCO, I have no slackening of determination that the company will continue to do right by its constituencies and that we will continue to grow in services and scope.

ATG: Tell us about EBSCO's growth in your various sectors. You seem to be doing well in the EBSCO Publishing end with electronic databases and are having real growth. But is the serials subscription service growth flat or decreasing?

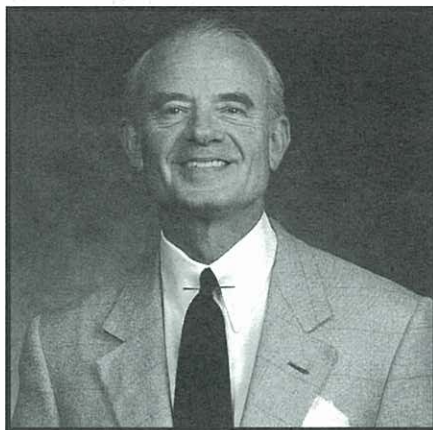
JS: Yes, EBSCO Publishing is pleased and thankful for its continued strong growth with our proprietary databases as well as a continuously increasing collection of licensed databases. Our systems have the key mission of improving resource awareness and convenient access from article databases to full text whether derived from publisher e-journal output or our investment in digitizing content.

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Property/dbckfrm1.htm — Checklist developed by the **University of Texas System** that focuses on licensing issues and suggests ways to remedy identified problems through online interaction with the checklist.

Values Conflict in the Digital Environment: Librarians Versus Copyright Holders — <http://www.unc.edu/~uncclng/Columbia-article3.htm> — Article by **Laura N. Gasaway** in *Columbia-VLA Journal of Law & the Arts*, vol. 24 (2000), that explores the contrasting core values of librarians, publishers, and society with regard to copyright; the highlighting of these value differences by the various exemptions of the Copyright Act; and library licensing and access to electronic products. 

URLs were verified on August 3, 2004.
Compiled by **Christine Wondolowski Gerstein, Hofstra University**.



Our serials subscription service has seen growth from former **RoweCom** customers who have come to us after the **RoweCom** demise, as well as new library and institutional customers not associated with **RoweCom** who have selected EBSCO. The overall average serials expenditure by customer shows slight growth, indicating customer budgets remain under pressure.

ATG: What sort of defection are you seeing by libraries and by publishers in terms of using the subscription agent as a middleman?

JS: Early in the life cycle of e-journals, there were many different business models and approaches. Some e-journal purchases went direct to publishers, some by **Elsevier** mandate and others by buyer choice. As the transition process has settled and gained more maturity among all involved, we are seeing those who formerly supported the publisher-direct model return to EBSCO. The advantages we offer in providing single-source service for multiple items from multiple publishers provides us every opportunity to be as beneficial with e-journals as we are in the print world.

As the number of available e-journals has increased exponentially, it is clear from our customers that this new environment has led to administrative overload, which is amplified if they deal directly with publishers. In the past, we have seen formerly order-direct print purchases come to us, indicating greater recognition of this administrative load. Now, after several years of dealing with e-journals, we are seeing e-journal orders coming back after having initially been direct to the publisher. The latter is increasing based on our review of the statistics. It is driven by many of the same factors that drove order-direct print to agents plus new factors related to e-journals. These range from inadequate publisher back office service and invoicing performance to ILS integration to the need for complete collection history and reporting.

As both publishers and libraries make the transition to e-journals, EBSCO is hard at work

to provide full service on both sides of the equation. We are confident that our single point of access for global e-journal needs translates into library convenience and efficiency, and that this is the main driver of strong internal growth in our e-journal volume.

ATG: The transition from print to electronic access, record keeping, ordering, etc., is a huge one for all of us. How does the subscription agent, with one foot firmly in the print world, survive in this new user-friendly but perhaps agent-unfriendly environment?

JS: The environment is not agent unfriendly. An agent, in whatever field, is an intermediary between many on each side. Only if the need to control, manage and simplify between the many vanishes does our opportunity wither. And we definitely do not see that occurring.

When **Academic Press** first initiated what might be described as "more content for supposedly the same purchase commitment but surely at a higher cost to the library," some major STM publishers followed suit. **Elsevier** distinguished itself with the construction of a large "sales" organization. This sales organization was not needed to sustain the value of editorial content. The content and its value have not changed. This new sales staff has "sold" what arguably would have naturally migrated from print to electronic because of innate conveniences associated with electronic information.

Some publishers have feared the improved usage measurement of the electronic environment would cut subscriptions and revenues. They have likely packaged and priced due to this fear, and they have fielded a staff to "sell" such. Others have simply been justifiably nervous about the other side of the transition and have deployed more library visitors than ever to "stay close." Throughout all, the content itself and not the media in which it exists is the essence of consumption. The content is what has the ultimate value.

A reaction to the overall transition has been that a market with a set price for each title changed into a kind of flea market arena for batch-and-bunch negotiation replete with professional lawyer and accountant negotiations. Illogical pricing differences from buyer to buyer have developed as well as difficulties that compound administrative problems for agents, buyers, libraries and publisher back offices, as commonality in pricing has faded.

How to survive? This agent (EBSCO) will continuously seek to understand the customer need and to engineer to be helpful enough not to be unneeded. Our solutions are valuable and must be the best.

ATG: Our reference librarians at the College of Charleston find EJS "unreliable." What sorts of improvements do you plan to make, if any, to EJS?

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JS: EJS is a work in progress - a gift of its times. It is a bold service system that has had to grow and transition with the maturing definition of e-journal needs.

We are always seeking to improve our services, and a number of steps have been taken to improve EJS. First, the introduction of more formal development methodology and a re-engineered organization structure for EJS has been established. **Oliver Pesch**, former technical director at **EBSCO Publishing** in Boston, now resides in Birmingham and is director of EJS development and operations.

A skilled and enlarged software quality assurance section is solidly in place. Until recently, search speed was not acceptable. A third-party service now proactively monitors search performance. Additional hardware is being put in place. Most significantly, we are in the midst of introducing a new search engine incorporating the search technology of **EBSCO Publishing**. We will process search results for improved delivery much faster than before.

Software tools have been added to monitor FTP sites and otherwise automatically detect newly available content. Recently, re-written XML loaders have increased throughput 30 times. Using content currency tools, we are continuously comparing our currency with the publisher sites.

A content team of richer capacity uses new software to proactively comb publisher sites for timeliness and completeness. Readers expect links to work and the content to be as current as the publisher site.

EJS has a growing customer base — there are currently 6,000 active customers. The service provides access to more than 10,000 e-journals. Of that number, we are able to acquire and load metadata for nearly 8,000 e-journals, which enables browsing and cross-publisher searching. Content is proactively pulled from various and often irregular sources.

An expanded online relations team has been brought on board to work with existing publishers to process their content more efficiently. They are also working to develop relationships with other key publishers to increase these numbers.

Your question is right on. We wish our delivery to speak more than these words. We thank the input, the high expectations and the constructive engagement for conquering this frontier.

ATG: What sorts of new initiatives are being taken by subscription agents to improve their middleman role?

JS: Initiatives required by the environmental changes of print to electronic need to be driven by the classic values of listen, learn, think and make it work for the library customer and publisher. We are guided by the thought that our job is to make acquiring and getting delivery of information from innumerable sources and to innumerable destinations both smooth and friendly. **EBSCO** has been in the embrace of electronic information for some time and,

surely, our early commitment to being a database publisher, database host and provider of electronic full text has been a great asset in being involved earlier than some.

Our biggest initiatives are in systems engineering. While maintaining the still very important capabilities required to service print journals, we have vastly increased resources for developing systems to access and deliver electronic information. This requires organizational additions, team skill additions, new mindsets and the commitment to integrate appropriately with the traditional print services.

One example of this type of system is **MetaPress**. **MetaPress** allows publisher customers to publish titles electronically regardless of present content or current format — through content management, Web hosting, Website development and e-commerce support. **MetaPress** is the largest primary host of STM content anywhere in the world. Hosted content includes data from **Springer Science+Business Media** (including the titles from the former **Kluwer Academic Publishing**), **Royal Society and Taylor & Francis**, to name a few. We facilitate instantaneous activation to these journals at time of order due to the IT links established between the two systems.

Other developed systems include **EBSCO A-to-ZSM** and **LinkSourceTM**, an OpenURL resolver. These are each made more effective because we are able to tie the knowledgebase updates to our order history — e-journals ordered through **EBSCO** will automatically appear on a customer's A-to-Z list and be available for article-level linking through the link resolver.

We are developing systems to better enable libraries to track changes in publisher e-journal ordering offerings. We have just implemented a proactive "push" service whereby we are notifying customers via email of these changes. Additionally, we are engineering systems that enable customers to order and better manage publisher package offerings. We are also enhancing our databases to capture and provide improved registration, authentication and license information to customers. We are evolving as needs emerge.

ATG: Is pay-per-view still a viable option? Are libraries using it? How about individuals?

JS: Yes, it is a viable option. We're still committed to it. Pay-per-view is limited by content limitation. Libraries are only using it a bit, and individuals a bit more.

ATG: Can you comment on Open Access and how you think **EBSCO Subscription Services** and **EBSCO Publishing** fit into the big picture?

JS: We support efforts to find publishing and distribution models that are economically feasible over the long run for both consumers and producers of scientific, technical and medical information. Open Access journals bring new and interesting business models that affect both libraries and publishers, and we will continue to monitor the various models being tested.

For academic institutions, the funding responsibility for scientific literature in the Open

Access model is often switching from the reader (or the library on behalf of the reader) to the researcher (often the library on behalf of the researcher). The result is a change in the budgeting and accounting processes within the institution. **EBSCO**, as a representative of libraries, is exploring different ways we can assist. Publishers are taking Open Access seriously, with many experimenting with a variety of business models. **EBSCO**, acting as both a subscription agent and an e-journal hosting platform provider (**MetaPress**), is proactively working with publishers to help with the efficiency and effectiveness of these efforts.

In terms of actual services that are in place today, our A-to-Z product allows an institution to quickly and easily include Open Access journals in their list. And for years, **EBSCO** has been working with publishers and libraries to provide order and access services for journals that come free or at a significant discount to members of various associations.

ATG: Can you comment on how **EBSCO** is working with third parties like **Turnitin** to combat plagiarism on the World Wide Web?

JS: Policing plagiarism related to journal articles has historically fallen to the publishers of journals.

Somewhat related to this is the issue of inappropriate distribution of published content. In this context, it is more a concern that entities may seek to purposely distribute e-journal content inappropriately. Certain countries around the world seem to present more of a problem on this front. This is another reason for publishers to work with **EBSCO** as their content distributor and agent. We are a long-term trusted partner, with offices and resources around the world available to handle the distribution of information in these sometimes problematic areas.

ATG: We have focused on **ESS** and **EBSCO Publishing**, but **EBSCO** has more than 4,500 employees, 600 outside the United States, and has diversified into over 20 businesses. You were founded in 1944 — over 60 years ago. Tell us about your growth and philosophy. Can you give us an overview? Frankly, for the uninitiated, keeping **EBSCO Industries**, **EIS**, **ESS**, **EJS**, **EBSCO Book Services**, **EBSCO Publishing**, **MetaPress**, **PRADCO**, etc. straight is, well, difficult if not impossible. Help!

JS: **EBSCO Industries, Inc.** is comprised of four broad categories of businesses: **EBSCO Information Services**, **Real Estate**, **Manufacturing** and **General Services**.

EBSCO Subscription Services, **EBSCO Publishing** and **EBSCO Book Services** form the **EBSCO Information Services** group. **EBSCO** is a worldwide leader in providing information access and management solutions through print and electronic journal subscription services, research database development and production, online access to approximately 150 databases and thousands of e-journals and online book purchasing. In addition, **EBSCO** provides e-resource access and management services through **EBSCO A-to-Z**, **EBSCOhost[®] Electronic Journals Service** and **LinkSource**.

Within the real estate category, **EBSCO** has

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developed two communities — The Town of Mt Laurel and the Alys Beach Community. These properties are both managed by **EBSCO Realty**, a licensed real estate broker in the state of Alabama. In cooperation with **EBSCO** managers, **EBSCO Realty** oversees the legal, financial and maintenance management of all properties used by **EBSCO**.

Located in North Shelby County, The Town of Mt Laurel is a traditional neighborhood development designed with the qualities of small town life — homes with front porches, safe and friendly tree-lined streets, and a pedestrian-oriented town center — while providing all of today's needs for comfortable living, including the latest communications technology.

Alys Beach is located 1/3 mile west of Rosemary Beach in Northwest Florida. It is approximately 160 acres and extends from the Gulf of Mexico across Hwy. 30A to pristine environmental preserve land along the north boundary.

EBSCO Industries' Manufacturing group includes: commercial printing through **EBSCO Media and Tinker Business Forms**; hunting and fishing products distributed under **PRADCO Outdoor Brands**, **Carry-Lite Decoys & Accessories**, **Code Blue**, **Green Mountain Rifle Barrel Co.**, **Knight & Hale Game Calls**, **Knight Rifles**, **Moultrie Feeders** and **Summit Treestands**; looseleaf binders and information packaging through **Vulcan Information Packaging**; point-of-purchase, trade show and literature display through **Siegel Display Products** and **Vulcan Industries**; promotional products supplier **Vitronic/Four Seasons**; sign sales and manufacturing through **J.M. Stewart Corporation** and **Wayne Industries**; specialty furniture through **H. Wilson Company** and **Luxor**; and steel joist manufacturer **Valley Joist**.

The **General Services Group** includes: in-

surance company **S.S. Nesbitt & Co.**, magazine publishing business **Grand View Media Group**; magazine subscription services through **EBSCO Reception Room Subscription Services**, **EBSCO Magazine Express** and **Vulcan Service**; military products and services through **Military Service Company**; printing/binding/laminating equipment and supplies through **NSC International**; promotional merchandise through **EBSCO Promotional Products**; and publishing-related services **MetaPress**, **Publisher Promotion & Fulfillment**, **EBSCO Consumer Magazine Services**, **Publishers' Warehouse** and **EBSCO TeleServices**.

We are diversified. We are a conglomerate. This is not because it is the thing to do or not the thing to do. It is because over the years we have seen opportunities, we have moved to them, and it has worked for us.

In the early 1960s, we redefined the mission of **EBSCO Information Services**. That definition became to service any multi-title institutional buyer from the elementary school to the university, no matter where located, with any serial publication or periodical or newspaper or journal, regardless of frequency, regardless of the media of publication or the nation of origin.

We still have ample room for growth in North America. We see tremendous opportunity in Europe, Latin America, Australia and the Far East, especially China. We see continued growth in reacquiring the e-journal business that has tried its hand at going direct. We are also experiencing growth in related areas of the business such as the service we offer through **MetaPress**, e-resource management tools such as **A-to-Z**, and databases.

We now offer rapid 24-hour order entry of new e-journal orders and rapid payment with the goal being immediate activation of e-journal orders. A 60-day waiting period doesn't cut it in the e-journal world. We recognize that and we're putting systems and services in place to

expedite this process. We also offer bulk loading of orders and have already established bulk activation with a significant number of e-journal providers. We're adding electronic journal specialists to each of our U.S. regional offices to handle publisher packages.


Our philosophy is guided by seven core values. These are:

1. Customer First
2. Sales
3. Growth
4. Profitability
5. Engineering...Seek Positive Change
6. Thrift
7. People - The Right People Are The Difference

ATG: *I notice that you have a timeline up on the Web. How come it doesn't mention your acquisition of RoweCom, Faxon, etc.? Can you tell us how this acquisition is proceeding?*

JS: We are proud to have been part of a solution to a crisis in the industry emanating from the apparent low integrity of another. It was no easy task and was completed by many pulling together including publishers, former **RoweCom** customers as represented by their creditor's committee and **EBSCO**. We incurred much in cost. We have gained customers who we seek to keep through good value, innovative products and superior service. Thus far, we are pleased with the feedback from our new customers. With the recent end of our fiscal year, we can say the acquisition is complete and our timeline will be updated.

ATG: *Tell us about your view of future business directions that EBSCO might undertake.*

JS: Adhere to our values — try to possess a character of humility, honesty, aggressiveness, industry, thrift and Charlestonian courtesy. 



ATG Interviews George Machovec

Associate Director, Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries

Managing Editor, *The Charleston Advisor*

<george@coalliance.org>

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

ATG: *It seems that the database reviews in the*

Charleston Advisor run the gamut of subject areas. Is that a conscious effort, or are you merely reflecting the marketplace? Do you have a percentage mix that you aim for?

GM: *The Charleston Advisor (TCA)* runs reviews for many different products and services. The only criteria is that they must be Web-based and be of interest to libraries. About 80% of the reviews are for subscription-based ser-

vices and the other 20% are of free services. The purpose behind the reviews of free Websites is to inform librarians about interesting projects or products that might be of interest to their constituents.

TCA runs the gamut in terms of types of products reviewed and their intended audience. Although I don't try for any particular percentages, I do try and make sure that most issues will have something of interest to everyone. This diversity means many different topics, types of services and target customers. Although the largest percentage of **TCA** subscribers is gen-

eral academic libraries there are also a substantial number of public libraries, special libraries, publishers, vendors, consortium offices and others.

We have also started experimenting with some topical issues. **Jill Emery** from the **University of Houston** was a guest special section editor for federated searching products in 2003. However, even with an occasional thematic issue, I still want to have some general reviews and editorials so that the issue will be of interest to someone who may not be interested in that particular theme.

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